A DISCOURSE

Concerning the

BEAUTY of PROVIDENCE

In all the rugged Paſſages of it.

Very ſeaſonable to quiet and ſupport the heart in theſe times of publick confuſion.

By JOHN WILKINS, B. D.

PSAL. 25. 10.

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to ſuch as keep his Covenant and his Teſtimonies.

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THE PREFACE To the READER.

AMongſt all other *Doctrines*, this of *Providence* (though it do properly belong to *Natural Theology*, yet) is of as Univerſal concernment both for knowledge and practice, as any other point, in *Chriſtian Divinity*.

The very Heathen have acknowledged, not only a *Univerſal* Providence of

God, which puts the *general* kinds of things into a regular way of working, But his *particular* Providence likewiſe, which takes care of *Individual* perſons and actions. Why elſe do all religions oblige men to pray unto him, and to expect his ſpecial aſſiſtance, in every kind of want or neceſſity?

But now, though this common principle be ſo univerſally acknowledged in the *Notion* of it, yet men are generally very negligent in the *practical* application of it to particular times and conditions; And ſo loſe that comfort and ſatisfaction that may be

be reaped from it.

It is the chief aime and buſineſſe of this Diſcourſe to convince and quicken men unto this duty, as being by ſo much the more ſeaſonable for theſe times, by how much the preſent troubles and confuſions do now call upon us for it.

It cannot but occaſion ſome ſuggeſtions of Diffidence and Infidelity, to conſider thoſe many ſtrange revolutions and changes in the world, which in outward appearance ſeeme ſo full of diſorder and wilde contingencies. And therefore it muſt needs be of ſpecial

quence for a man to have his heart eſtabliſhed in the knowledge and belief of this truth here inſiſted upon.

Pſal. 73. Jer. 12. In all ages of the world men have beene much ſtartled in their judgments by that unequal diſpenſation which ſeems to be in theſe outward things, Eccleſ. 9. 2 *That one event ſhould be to* Cha. 5. 15 *the righteous and the wicked.* Nay, Ch. 8. 14 *That a Juſt man ſhould periſh in his righteouſneſs, and the wicked ſhould proſper in his wickedneſs. That on the ſide of the* Ch. 4. v. 1. *Oppreſſor there ſhould be might, and the Oppreſſed ſhould have none to comfort them.* This hath ſometimes

times ſo amazed and perplexed the thoughts of conſidering men, that whilſt they looked barely upon events, they could not tell how to extricate themſelves from theſe difficulties; which occaſioned that ſpeech of *Solomon*, *Surely oppreſſion makes a wiſe man mad*; that is, puts him to his wits end, tranſports him with wild imaginations, whilſt he knows not readily what to anſwer in defence of ſuch proceedings. Ch. 7. v. 7.

But now he that ſhal ſeriouſly conſider how every thing is managed by an all-ſeeing Providence, which is exactly careful,

and infinitelywiſe, ſuch a man will be eaſily ſatisfied that in all theſe obſcure adminiſtrations, (which ſeem unto us ſo full of caſual, negligent, promiſcuous events) there is an admirable, (though unſearchable)contrivance.

As for the particular deſigne which Providence may aime at in ſome diſpenſations, this doth not alwayes fall under our reach. *It is the glory of God to conceale a matter.* And many of his workes are ſo ordered, that *though a man labour to ſeek them out, yet he ſhall not find them.* Yea further, *Though a wiſe man think to know them, yet*

Prov. 25. 2

Eccleſ. 8. 7. 1

yet ſhall he not be able to finde them. And therefore, where we cannot underſtand his wayes, it is there our duty, with an humble reverence to believe and admire the wiſdome of them,

How would this, (if rightly conſidered and applied) ſilence all thoſe unſeemly murmurings and complaints of men in theſe times? Remember, there is nothing befals us but *what the counſel of God had before determined to be done.* Act. 4 28. And he can order things for the beſt, as well when they croſſe our deſires as when they comply with them.

And

And therefore *when you*
Eccles. 58. *see the violent perverting of judgement and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter.* That is, Be not transported with wonder or impatience, or unbelief, as if the Providence of God were regardlesse or negligent. *For he that is higher then the highest regardeth.* Though they that have the highest power amongst men may be so farre from *remedying*, that they rather *incourage* such disorders, yet God hath a strict watchful eye upon them. And though men may be apt to secure themselves in such proceedings, by the great-

greatneſs of their owne ſtrength, as if there were nothing above them, yet *there are higher then they.* And *there is a time, when God will judge both the righteous and the wicked.* Ch. 3. 17.

Let us be careful of our own duty, to ſerve Providence in the uſual means, and leave the diſpoſal of eventsto him. It ſhould be every mans chiefe buſineſs to *clear up the evidences* of his particular title and relation unto *this great governour of the world,* and this will be the ſureſt meanes to ſet us above the fear or hurt of all outward changes.

We ſee with what Artifice

tifice and complyance men will insinuate themselves into the affection of those who (according to several revolutions) are advanced into the places of power. Of how much greater advantage would it be, to get an interest in his favour who doth and shall alwayes rule over the sons of men, having all times at his disposal, out of whose hands no strength or policy shall ever be able to wrest the sway and dominion of things?

It cannot but afford strong consolation unto every true beleever to consider, that he who hath the chief influence in all these

great

great changes and variety of events in the world, is both *his God* and *his Father*.

How did this quiet the heart of old *Eli*? 1 Sam. 3.18. *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* And *David* upon the same consideration professeth, *I was dumbe, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.* Psal.39.9 And our blessed Saviour himself makes use of this argument, *The cup that my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* Joh.18.11 Though the potion be bitter and displeasing, yet so long as it comes from a loving & careful Father we have no reason to fear any hurt by it.

And

And on the other ſide, much of mens unquietneſs and dejection, is occaſioned, either by the want of this evidence, or by the neglect of applying it. When they terminate their thoughts upon ſecondary inſtruments, *Fearing men* Iſa 51.12, 13. *that ſhal dy, and the ſons of men that ſhall be made as graſs: forgetting the Lord their Maker, who ſtretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth.* That is that which makes men to *fear continually, becauſe of the fury of the oppreſſor.*

How would it compoſe all theſe fears and diſtempers, if men would but labor

bor after this assurance of their interest in God with the same zeal and intention of minde wherewith they prosecute their particular engagements and animosities against one another. He that hath God for his strength and refuge is always sure to be on the strongest side, and need not fear the most tempestuous mutations. *Though the earth be removed and the mountains should be carried into the midst of the sea: Though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled and the mountains shake with the swelling therof.*

Thus much I thought fit to premise in the gene-

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rall, concerning the neceſſity and ſeaſonableneſſe of this Subject.

As for the particular occaſion of publiſhing this Diſcourſe, I have nothing to ſay but this; That being ſolicited for a Copy of it by divers perſons (and ſome of eminent quality) before whom it was occaſionally preached, I knew not any more convenient way to ſatisfie their deſires, then by ſuch a publick communication of it.

I could ſpeak ſomething from *my own* experience

perience concerning the efficacy of this Doctrine againſt thoſe damps and dejections of minde, unto which ſuch times as theſe will expoſe a man. It is my hearty prayer, that it may be uſefull to *others* alſo in this reſpect.

Farewell.

THE BEAUTY OF PROVIDENCE.

Eccles. 3. 11.

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, yet no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

THis *Book* contains *Solomons* experience in his search for contentment; which being not to be found amongst

mongſt any of the creatures, he adviſes never to trouble our ſelves in an eager proſecution after them, but to enjoy our poſſeſſions with a chearful, liberal minde, without perplexing our ſelves in ſuch cares and labours, as may defraud us of thoſe honeſt comforts to be had by them; *For there is nothing better for a man then that he ſhould eat and drink, and make his ſoul enjoy good in his labour*, ch. 2. v. 24. That is one of the *Concluſions* which *Solomon* infers from his former diſcourſe, and which he further amplifies, and confirmes in the follow-

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ing Parts of his Sermon. It being his chief ſcope in this book, to direct men how to behave themſelves with chearfulneſſe and contentment under all thoſe great revolutions, and that variety of events which may befall them in the world.

This *Chapter* contains a diſcourſe concerning Gods government and diſpoſall of times; and is therefore not unfitly ſtiled, the *Calendar* or *Ephemerides* of ſeaſons: whence the Wiſeman with divers arguments urges upon us what he had before commended,

a cheerfull and contented minde.

The text is one of these arguments; *God hath made every thing beautifull in his time*; that is, There is a wise order and contrivance in all the works of Providence; Every particular event is most seasonable in that time which God appoints; And therefore we have no reason to repine at our condition, as if matters did not go well with us, for 'tis impossible they should have been better then they are; though they do crosse our private hopes and desires, yet God best understands the

the fitteſt order and ſeaſon for all things, making them beautifull in his time.

Alſo he hath ſet the world in their heart: By *world* here is not meant this materiall world, but *ſeculum*, the ſucceſſion and courſe of things, as the original word עלם does properly import. This God hath ſet in, or* *expounded* unto mens hearts; that is, he hath endowed us with an ability to diſcerne in ſome meaſure that ſeaſonableneſs which he obſerves in the government of the world.

* נתן עבם

Yet there is no man can find out the work that God makes

makes from the beginning to the end: that is, 'tis above humane ability to comprehend the reason of all divine proceedings, we cannot finde them fully out from the beginning to the end.

This very suitable to the original.

Others conceive that the words may be more properly rendred thus: *As long as the world shall last God doth reveale unto mens hearts the work which he makes, from the beginning to the end, excepting only some things unto which man cannot attain.* As if he should have said, In all ages of the world, there are still some passages of providence, wherein men may

may be able to discern a beauty and comelineſſe though there are ſome other particulars which we cannot underſtand. The ſenſe of both Interpretations being for the ſubſtance much alike.

That's the connexion and meaning of the whole verſe. The text according to its naturall fulneſſe doth comprize in it theſe three particulars.

1. Every thing has its time.

2. Every thing in its time is beautifull.

3. That is the proper ſeaſon for all things which God appoints.

1. Every thing has its time. *To all things there is an appointed ſeaſon*, ver. 1. Not only for ſuch *natural* events, as bear in them a kind of neceſſity, *as a time to be born, and a time to die.* ver. 2. But alſo for thoſe *voluntary* actions that ſeem to be moſt alterable and contingent; *A time to weep, and a time to laugh*, ver. 4. The wiſdome of Providence in the government of this lower world, hath diſpoſed to every thing its particular ſeaſon. This is that which we call, the *fulneſs* of time, the *ripeneſs* of ſeaſon. *Prov.* 27. 1. the wiſe man ſayes there, that

that *the day brings forth events*, *Paritura est dies*; alluding to a teeming mother, to whom there is a set date for her delivery. So doth time travel with the decrees of Providence, and for each several action, there is a pregnancy, a fulness of time.

2. Every thing in its time is beautiful, even such matters as in their own natures are not without some deformity. *A time to kill*, ver. 3. *A time to mourn*, v. 4. *A time of hate, a time of warre*, ver. 8. The scorching of Summer, and the extreem cold of Winter, though

both in themſelves alike diſtaſtfull, yet are comely in their ſeaſons, and thoſe times would not be ſo beautiful without them. Nor is it the naturall goodneſſe of any thing that can make it comely out of its proper ſeaſon. That which *Beauty* is in bodies, and *Harmony* in ſounds, that is *opportunity* in Time; Now as white and red, which are the uſuall materials of *beauty*, as thoſe Particular notes of which *Muſick* doth conſiſt, may be ſo diſpoſed of, as to cauſe *deformity* and *diſcord*; So actions, which in themſelves are good, may

be

be depraved by their unseasonablenesse.

3. That is the proper season for all things which God appoints. Or thus. Every particular event, is most beautifull in that time which the Providence of God hath allotted to it. 'Tis above the contrivance of humane Policy to bring matters about in their fittest order. And therefore 'twere but folly to conclude that things do not fall out well, unlesse they answer our desires; for God best understands the fittest season for every purpose. And whatsoever, or whensoever he

works, you may be sure, 'tis both beautiful and in its time; Even those events, which do most thwart our Private ends, (could all circumstances be duly considered) we should finde them to be performed in their most comely order and best opportunity.

As for the two first particulars, though they are implyed in the Text, yet are they more expresly handled in the former verses. And therefore I shall passe them over, without any further inlargement, insisting only upon this latter, as being more directly agreeable to

to the maine ſcope of the words.

And 't is a ſubject that in many reſpects will deſerve your more eſpecial attention; 'Tis not commonly treated of. And beſides, it may very much conduce to our contentment, to ſettle our hearts, againſt all thoſe conditions that may befal us in the world. 'Tis of very general uſe and concernment ſuitable to all times and occaſions. For times of *ſuffering*, to make us patient and ſubmiſsive; For times of *mercy*, to make us cheerfull and thankfull. In brief, it extends to all

perſons, relations, buſineſſes, ſeaſons; nothing is more generally uſefull then this, to have our hearts fully perſwaded of that wiſe order and contrivance which there is in the diſpoſall of every particular event in the world. And 'tis more eſpecially ſeaſonable for times of trouble and confuſion, when men are apt to miſtruſt the government of providence, as if he did neglect the care of this lower world, and leave all things to their own jarring principles. Then (I ſay) 'tis more eſpecially ſeaſonable, to vindicate the care and wiſ-

wiſdome of Providence, to ſhew that every thing which God doth is beſt, and conſequently, that theſe many diſtractions and confuſions under which we ſuffer, are farre better then any other (though the moſt flouriſhing) condition could be. And that's the ſubject I am now to inſiſt upon. The point is this:

Every particular event is moſt beautifull in that time which the Providence of God hath allotted to it. Propoſ.

A truth by ſo much the more ſeaſonable for theſe times, by how much 'tis now the more difficult to beleeve it.

The observation lies plainly both in the scope of the place, and the most obvious sense of the words.

Confirmation by Testimony divine.

The Scripture is copious in other proofs to this purpose. *Deut.* 32.4. *His work is perfect, and his wayes are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right.* Not only his first *work* of creation is exactly good and perfect; but his *wayes* of Providence also are disposed with judgment and righteousness.

So again, *Isa.* 28.29. *The Lord of hosts is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working*; that is, every event

So. Jer. 32. 19.

vent of Providence, is managed and pre-ordained by an admirable wisdome, and therefore must needs be of *excellent* contrivance.

And again, *Dan.* 2.20, 21. *Wisdome and might are his, he changeth the times & the seasons, he removeth Kings, and he setteth up Kings:* Those two attributes of strength and wisdome are for the most part put together in Scripture; God never shews any argument of his *strength*, but his *wisdome* is ingaged in it also. Those great alterations and subversions, which happen in the world, do not more

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more demonstrate the greatness of his *power* in the doing of them, then the greatness of his *wisdome*, in disposing of them for the best.

And again. *Psal.* 104. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdome hast thou made them all, the earth is full of thy riches.* Which is as well true of the works of *Providence*, as of the works of *creation.*

But this truth is more directly intimated by that vision of *Ezekiel*, in the first Chapter of his Prophecie, wherein he doth express how all events in the world are wisely

wiſely diſpoſed of, by the care and Government of Providence. The ſcope of that viſion was to confirm the faith of the Prophet in the certainty of thoſe things which he was to foretel; becauſe God himſelf by whom he was inſpired, had ſuch a ſpecial influence in the orderly managing of all inferior events.

Though matters might ſeem *to run upon wheels* (as we ſay) to follow their own courſes, without any ſpecial guidance, to go at random, yet *theſe wheels have eyes in them*, v. 18. that is, there is the eye of Providence which directs

2 Chr. 16. 9. directs them in their revolutions And then besides, these wheels are
Prov. 15 3 Ver. 10. likewise *governd by the four living creatures*, that is, by the Angels of God, who are fitted for all their services, with foure remarkable endowments.

1. With wisdom and prudence, typified in that vision, by the *face of a man.*

2. Courage and resolution, *the face of a Lion.*

3. Sedulitie, and diligence, *the face of an Ox.*

4. Swiftnesse and dispatch, *the face of an Eagle.*

In all which the Prophet doth at large explain unto us, with what delibe-

deliberate care and forecast, the providence of God doth dispose of all these inferior events.

This truth may yet be further evidenced, from the very light of Nature, and the testimony of the Heathen. Hence was it that the Ancients did set forth their gods with Harps in their hands, to shew the harmony they observed in the government of the world. And *Midas* was condemned to wear Asses eares, because he preferred *Pans* Pipe before *Appollos* Lute; Humane policy before divine providence. Humane testimony. Bacons Sap. Vir.

Nay, the divel himself doth

doth acknowledg the wisdome and seasonablenesse of Divine proceedings, and therefore would fain have sheltred himself under this pretence, *Mat.8.29. Art thou come to torment us before our time?* Implying that it would not become the God of order to do any thing *untimely*. And doubtless that must needs be an evident and a great truth, which is confest by the mouth of so great a liar.

For the further confirmation of this, let us a little consider some of those rugged passages of Providence, which seem

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to be performed with the greateſt negligence and deformity.

Look upon the Hiſtory of *Joſeph*, he was (you know) one of the promiſed Seed, concerning whome God had foretold, a ſuperiority and dominion over the reſt of his family. Now, that after this, he ſhould be expoſed to the treachery of his malicious brethren; That beſides his nearneſſe to ſlaughter from their hands, he ſhould be ſold into a far Country, whence there was no hopes ever to hear of him again; That there he ſhould be ſo endan- Exsmples

endangered by the rage of a luſtful woman, and ſuffer ſo tedious and unjuſt an impriſonment, all this might ſeem to be an overſight and neglect of Providence, as if it had forgotten the promotion which *Joſeph* was deſigned to. And yet do but reflect upon the latter part of the ſtory, and you ſhall finde, how all theſe misfortunes did mightily conduce, not only to his advancement, but all to the ſafety and preſervation of that whole family, which was then the viſible Church. So that if each of his brethren had given him as much

much money as they ſold him for, it had not been ſo great a kindneſſe as he received from their intended cruelty.

It is an elegant gloſſe of St. *Gregory* upon this ſtory, *Divino judicio quod declinare conati ſunt, reſiſtendo ſervierunt: Ideo venditus eſt à fratribus* Joſeph *ne adoraretur, ſed ideo eſt adoratus, quia venditus.* It was ſo ordered by Providence, that what they ſought to decline, they did promote, even by their ſtriving againſt it; *Joſeph* was therefore ſold by his brethren, that he might not be worſhiped, and yet he was therefore worſhip-

worshiped; because he was sold. *Sic divinum consilium dum devitatur, impletur; sic humana sapientia dum reluctatur, comprehenditur.* Even so the divine counsel is accomplished in being opposed; so humane policy is defeated by the means of promoting it.

David. Thus also is it in the History of *David*, he was (you know) designed to a Kingdom, but how many straits was he put to before he attained it? being forced into the wilderness like a wandring out-law, and followed there by a company of discontented persons

ſons, who was as ready perhaps, upon every trivial occaſion to revolt from him, as before from *Saul*. But above all the reſt, his laſt diſtreſs was one of the moſt deſperate, when he was ſpoiled at *Ziglag*, not only of his goods, but his wives and children too, when his owne Souldiers in their mutiny and diſcontent were ready to ſtone him; there being then but little hopes to ſave his life, much leſſe to get a Kingdome: And yet this diſtreſſe alſo was in the event of it contrived to his advantage. For having afterwards purſued the *Amalekites*,

lekites, he not only recovered his own, but got also such abundance of other spoils from them, as served him for rich presents, whereby he might renew and confirme the friendship of his wel-wishers in Israel, that after the death of *Saul* (which presently followed) he might by their free votes be chose to succeed him; 1 *Sam.* 30. & *ch.* 31.

Jonah. You may observe likewise somewhat to this purpose in the story of *Jonah*, when he was sent to *Nineveh* about so weighty a matter as the safety of that great populous City, and that too

too, when their deſtruction was within ken, but forty dayes off, that he ſhould now make delayes and flye to *Tarſhiſh*, that upon ſuch a ſtraite, he ſhould runne himſelf into hazards, might ſeeme to argue ſome careleſneſſe and neglect in the Government of Providence. And yet this error of his was ſo wiſely managed in the event, that it proved a great advantage to the main end of his buſineſſe. For 'tis a probable opinion that theſe mariners, who caſt *Jonah* into the Sea, were a ſpecial occaſion that his preaching was ſo ſucceſſeful

afterwards. The *Ninevites* being by them informed that this was that Prophet, for whom they had lately suffered so violent a tempest, how the winds ceased, and all was calmed again, when they had once cast him into the Sea; from whence it was not possible he should be delivered but by a miracle. And therefore they concluded that this must needs be some man extraordinarily inspired from above, and that his preaching was not idle threats, but such as might justly fright them into that rigorous Fast which afterwards we read

read of, both for man and beast. It being the wisdome of providence so to contrive it, that this offence of *Jonah* should mightily advantage that end, which it did seem most directly to oppose.

So likewise for that dissention betwixt *Paul* and *Barnabas*, *Acts* 15. it might seem the most unseasonable breach, that could possibly be imagined, when the Church of the Christians was now in its beginnings and infancy, that then the two chief members of it should fall at variance amongst themselves, was such an untimely dissen-

Paul and Barnabas.

sion that an enemy could not wish them worse. Nothing could more thwart the promulgation of the Gospel of Peace, then the contentions of those that preach it. If that State which is already established into *a Kingdom, divided against it self, cannot* Mat. 12. 25. *stand*, much less could those small beginnings think to increase into a Church by divisions.

And yet this likewise was so disposed of in the event, that it did mightily conduce to the propagation of the Gospel thorow the whole world; for by this means, those two parted asunder; the one

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into *Cyprus*, the other into *Syria* and *Cilicia*, and like two mighty streames spread themselves several wayes, that so they might the better water the barren and thirstie corners of the world. Ver. 39. 40. 41.

Thus have you seen the Beauty of providence in some ruged passages of it. 'Tis so in every other particular, though seeming unto us never so deformed. But man cannot find out the work of God from the beginning to the end.

For the further evidencing of this truth, there are two grounds upon which 'tis bottom- Confirmation by reason.

ed, that being rightly understood and considered, will make the point very clear.

1. God is exactly carefull of every thing.

2. He is infinitely wise for the disposal of all to the best.

Reason 1. 1. God doth over-look all things by an especial Providence, *Ephes.* 1. 11. *He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.* There is no event in the world but it is ordered both according to Gods *will* and by his *counsel*, *Psa.* 135. 6. *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he both in heaven, and in earth and in the Sea, and in all deep*

deep places. Not only in the *heaven*, where his glory is more especially conspicuous, but in the *earth* too, where matters seem to be full of confusion. *And in the Sea, and in all deep places*, where we cannot so much as take notice of them. There is nothing so *great* but is under his *Power*, nothing so *little* but is within his *care*. Those actions and events that seem unto us most *free, casual, inconsiderable*, are all of them ordered by his Providence.

1. That which is *most free*, the hearts and affections of men do follow the guidance of his de-

crees; men may do after their own counsels and inclinations, but they are still suitable to his providence; there is nothing more in our command, then our thoughts and words, and yet both *the preparation of the heart, & the answer of the tongue is from the Lord*, Prov. 16. 1.

2. That which seems most *casual, The disposing the Lot is from him.* Prov. 16. 33. He who is accidentally slain by another, is said *to be delivered into his hands by God*, Exo. 21. 13. That casual arrow shot at randome was directed by providence to fulfil the prediction of

Ahabs

Ahab's death, 1 *Kin.* 22. 34. There is no liberty for causes to operate in a loose and straggling way, but in matters of greatest uncertainty there is a pre-ordained course of effects.

3. *The least most inconsiderable things*, are not neglected by providence. It was a * prophane speech of the Aramites, *That God was the God of the mountains, not of the valleys.* 1 King. 20. 23. whereas he regards *the lowest*, *the least* thing as well as the *greatest*. *The young Lions*, Psal. 104. 21. The *Ravens*, Psal. 147. 9. are provided for by him.

* Like that of the Poet: *Non vacat exiguis rebus adesse Jovi.*

He feeds the *fowls of the air*, adorns the *lilies*, and clothes *the grasse of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven* Sparrows (you know) are but cheap birds, *Are not two of them sold for a farthing:* Mat 10.29. *And yet not one of these do fall to the ground without your father.* He must give the Fowler leave to kill them; nay, when they are upon the wing in their frequent and often repeated motions, yet then it is he that must appoint them the time and place when and where they shall settle; and in this sense also, *not one of them doth*

fall

fall to the ground without your father. The hairs of your head are yet leſs obſervable, contemptible even to a Proverb, *Pili non facio, Ne pilo quidem melius.* And yet theſe with God, are *inter numerata*, amongſt thoſe things whereof he takes an exact account.

That place, 1 *Cor.* 9. 9. *Doth God take care for oxen?* doth not ſimply exempt ſuch things from the law of his providence; but tis *Argumentum à minori*, and doth imply his more eſpecial care of that higher rank of creatures to whom theſe are ſubordinate. The plain mean-

ning of it is, That if God hath by a particular law provided that the Ox should not be muzled which treads out the corn, he will be much more careful of the labourers in his Harvest.

'Tis recorded to the glory of some Ancient Generals, that they were able to call every common souldier by his own name, and careful to provide, not onely pay for their Captains, but *litter* also for the meanest beast that did serve the Camp. Now you know there is not any creature but is a souldier to the Lord of hosts, he doth some-

sometimes muster up an Army of lice and flies; and therefore 'tis but reason that his providence should take care for such things also. Why should it not be as great an argument of his power to preserve and *order* these lesser creatures, as it was at first to *make them*? The creation of a glorious Angel, did not cost him more, then that of a despicable flye. Was it not he that out of the same primitive nothing, put that difference which there is amongst several natures; And if the painter in the same piece draw a silken and a woollen

ſen argument, why ſhould he value the one above the other, ſince it was the ſame art that did both make and diſtinguiſh them?

Reaſ. 2. 2. As his providence doth extend to all things; ſo likewiſe does *his wiſdome*. As he is exactly careful, ſo is he infinitely wiſe; and therefore as able for the contrivance of every the leaſt particular thing, as he would be, if he had nothing but that to look after. If the providence of God had but *one project* on foot, we could eaſily conceive how he might be able to drive that through all the

the windings and circumſtances of it, with care and wiſdome. Nay, we would truſt any wiſe man with the managing of *a ſingle buſineſs*, when he had nothing elſe to diſtract his endeavours: But for all thoſe multitude of affairs amongſt men and Angels, nay, for the very *circumſtances* and *manner* of all thoſe ſeveral actions and motions which are performed in every moment of time through the whole world; we cannot conceive but that in ſuch a tumult of buſineſs, the eye of Providence may be ſometimes over-ſeen.

But

But this arises from our mistake of the Divine nature, we measure God by our own *finite abilities*, whereas we should consider, that that which is *infinite* cannot be confined by time, or number, or place; but is as well able at all times, to look to all things, in all places, as if there were only one business to be cared for. You may see some imperfect resemblance of this amongst the Creatures. Do but consider the *Sun*, how that at the same time, without labour or confusion, it is imployed in divers services for all the creatures under heaven;

The

The distinctions of seasons, the growth of several plants, its various influence upon Minerals, the cherishing of living creatures, with sundry other such variety of imployments, which we are not able so much as to take notice of. Or else, do but mark the nature of the *Soul*, which at the same time perhaps doth *contemplate* heaven, *direct* the body in its sundry motions, *distribute* the food in a wise proportion to the several parts, not neglecting so much as the least hair about it, but supplying that with suitable nourishment. And

all

all this it does without wearineſſe or diſtraction. And if a creature can do thus, much more then the Creator, who gives to every thing its proper ability, and doth actuate all things, by a more immediate aſſiſtance then the Soul it ſelf. So that though we ſuppoſe *infinite occaſions*, (which notwithſtanding creatures are not capable of) yet the providence and wiſdome of God is *infinite* alſo; and there is the ſame proportion of infinite to infinite, as of one to one.

Now put both theſe Reaſons together, if the providence

Providence of God be thus *exactly careful* of every the least particular: If he be thus *infinitely wise* for the disposal of all to the best, no wonder then, though every event in the world be both beautiful, and in its time.

For the further clearing of this truth, there are two doubts or *queries* to be resolved, that seem to oppose it. Vindication from doubts and objections.

1. What's the reason why this Beauty of Providence doth not appear to us, but that many things seem so full of disorder and confusion in the world?

2. How may this consist

sist with the permission of sinful actions, which can neither be beautiful nor seasonable.

I begin with the first, to shew the reason why in so many things we cannot discern this beauty of Providence. The verse of the text tells us, *That man cannot find out the work of God from the beginning to the end*: That is, 'tis above humane capacity to comprehend the reason of all divine proceedings, we cannot find them fully out, from the beginning to the end. And so *Job* 9.10. *He doth great things past finding out. Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him*

him not; He passeth on also but I perceive him not. And again, Chap. 23. 8, 9. *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.* The meaning is, that where ever Job turned his eyes, there were still some passages of providence which he could not apprehend the meaning of. God hath reserved this as a peculiar prerogative to himself. *It is not for us to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power,* Act. 1. 7

There

There may be a two-fold reason of this.

1. The obscurity of the things themselves. There are *treasures of wisdome*, Col. 2. 3. Not only for their *preciousness*, but for their *privateness* too. *Hidden wisdome*, 2 Cor. 1. 7. *secrets of wisdom, And these are double to that which is*, (as *Zophar* speak) *Job* 11. 6. That is, those concealed providences, which we do not discern the reason of, are of much greater proportion then those that appear. We read in that fore-cited place, *Ezek.* 1. 16. of *a wheel within a wheel*, signifying those involutions and

and intricacies which there are in the wayes of Providence. And the Pſalmiſt tels us, that *his way is in the Sea, and his paths in the great waters; and his footſteps are not known*, Pſal. 77. 19.

As it is in the works of *Nature*, where there are many common things of excellent beauty, which for their *littleneſs* do not fall under our ſenſe; they that have experimented the uſe of *Microſcopes*, can tell, how in the parts of the moſt minute creatures, there may be diſcerned ſuch gildings and embroideries, and ſuch curious variety as another

ther would scarce believe. Why, 'tis so in the works of *Providence*, there are very many passages of frequent daily occurrence, whose excellent contrivance doth not fall under our sense or observation.

2. Our own ignorance and short sighted neglect: and that in a two fold respect:

1. We cannot see the *end and drift* which providence aimes at in many particulars; and therefore no wonder though they seem unto us rude and uncomely. We measure things by this false balance of *opinion*, which weighs

weighs onely their *outsides*, and doth not look upon their *ends* and *relations*. Now the beauty of things doth consist much in their tendency and reference to their proper ends. If an ignorant man that knows not the reason of a Winde-mill or Water-mill, should look upon them onely as places of *habitation*, he cannot think them well situated, where they are so much expoled to the violence of winds and waves: whereas he that understands how the wisdome of the Artificer hath contrived those motions unto *useful ends*, must needs confesse

confesse a beauty and comelinesse in the work. 'Tis so likewise in the events of providence, which none can rightly apprehend, but he that understands the speciall drift and purposes which they are defined to.

2. We cannot see *the whole frame of things*, how sundry particular events in a mutuall relation do concur to make up the beautie of the whole. He that can discern onely two or three wheels in a Clock, how they move one against another, would presently thinke, that there were *contrariety* and *confusion* in the work.

Whereas

whereas he that beholds *the whole frame*, and discerns how all those divers motions do joyntly conduce to the same end, cannot choose but acknowledge a wise order in the contrivance of it. So likewise is it in the *frame of times*, where he alone is fit to judge of particulars; who understands how they refer to *the general*. But now *we are but of yesterday & know nothing, because our dayes upon earth are as a shadow* (saith *Bildad*) *Job* 8. 9. We look upon things according to a *short succession*, and so are not able to discern that beauty

which there is in their references to other matters *afar off*. But now *to God a thousand years is but as one day*. He beholds all things whether past or to come in the same *instant*. There is no *succession* in eternity, but all things within the reach of time are *present* unto that. Though in the revolution of a wheel, there be a mutuall succession betwixt the parts contained *in it*, yet an eye that is placed *without* can at the same time discern the whole motion. Thus also is it in the revolution of time, where though there be a mutuall succession betwixt those things

Psal. 90. 4.
2 Pet. 3. 8

things that are contained *under time*, yet God, who is *without* and *above it*, doth at the same view behold all together. So that 'tis no wonder, though many things seeme beautifull to him, which to us who are so short-sighted, may appeare harsh and deformed.

2. The 2d. *Querie* was this: If there be such an over ruling Providence which doth dispose of all to the best, how comes it to passe that there are so many sinfull actions in the world?

To this answer two things:

1. *When men thwart*

Gods will of Precept, they serve his will of povidence. Thoſe particular intereſts of gain, honour, pleaſure, revenge, which ſway mens deſires and actions, are wiſely contrived to the promoting of Gods decrees and glory. When *Auguſtus* made the general tax upon the world, His end was to inrich himſelf, and fill his coffers. But God uſed it as a means to fulfil the prophecie of Chriſts birth at *Bethlehem*. *Rehoboam*, and *Jehu*, and *Cyrus*, had all their ſeveral aimes in thoſe works wherein they were ſubſervient to Providence. And they did ſtil accompliſh

accomplish his counsel in prosecuting their own designs.

2. *That which in respect of mans execution is wicked and disorderly, in respect of Gods appointment is beautiful & comely.* There could not be any more horrid act, then the Betraying and crucifying of our blessed Saviour; and yet even in this, as it was *decreed by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledg of God*, Act. 2. 23, there was the greatest miracle of divine wisdome that ever was extended to the creature. Such depths of policy, which all the subtilty of men or Angels, was

not able to *contrive*, no nor to *suspect*, πολυποίκιλος σοφία, as the Apostle calls it, *Eph.* 3. 10 *Interchangeable wisdom*, of *curious variety*, as the word signifies. Now if God could thus manage the *worst* action of man to the *best* advantage of man, well then may we conclude, that every event of providence is beautiful in its time.

Applicat. I have now done with the *Explication* and *Confirmation* of the text. In the *Application*, it may be useful for these lessons:

1. *Use* For information. 1. For *Information*, and that in a twofold respect.

1. It may teach us our duty to take notice of, and

and observe the works of providence.

2. It may direct us what to judge of the affairs of these times under which we are fallen.

1. If all the events of Providence be so wisely contrived, 'tis certainly then our duty to consider and to take notice of them: *Psal.* 111. 2. *The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.* And again, *v.* 4. *He hath so done his marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance.* Now a man cannot be said to *seek out* or to *remember* that which he doth not carefully ob-

ſerve. 'Tis the chief ſcope of that *Pſalm* to excite men unto this duty. And *David* makes it a note of piety for men to delight themſelves in the contemplation of Gods works, *to remember him in his wayes*, as the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſpeaks.] This *Aſaph* found by experience to be a ſpecial Antidote againſt all diffidence and carnal fears. In the 77. *Pſalm*, when he was ſurprized with thoſe ſad thoughts, *Will the Lord caſt us off for ever, and will he be no more intreated? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?* &c. he preſently applyes himſelf to this remedy,

Iſai. 65. 4

medy, *v.* 11. 12. *I will remember the works of the Lord; ſurely, I will remember thy wonders of old: I will meditate alſo of thy works, and talk of thy doings.*

If a man were but well read in the ſtory and various paſſages of his life, he might be able to make an experimental Divinity of his own. He that is obſervant of Gods *former* dealings and diſpenſations towards him, may be thence furniſhed with a rich treaſury of experience againſt all *future* conditions.

There are very many duties that depend upon a right underſtanding of

the times. A man knows not how to order his services of *prayer* and *praises*, without some observation and skill in these. It was a great commendation which was given to the men of *Issachar*, that *they had understanding in the times to know what Israel ought to do*, 1 Chro. 12. 32. And the ignorance of these the Wise man complains of, as being a very great evil, *Eccles.* 9. 12. *For man knoweth not his time, but as fishes are taken in an evill net, and as birds are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.*

Now

Now this obſervance of Gods works and diſpenſations, is a duty alwayes ſeaſonable, but more eſpecially in ſuch times as theſe. 'Tis commonly obſerved, that though ſmooth and peaceable times are beſt for the *liver*, the man that lives in them, yet times that are full of change and viciſſitude are beſt for the *writer*, the Hiſtorian that writes of them; ſo though quiet ſeaſons may beſt ſuite with our deſires and outward condition, yet theſe diſturbed, confuſed times, may be beſt improved by obſervation, and do moſt ſet forth the

wiſdom

wisdome of Providence.

The *common* providence of God in the various seasons and order of nature, may afford excellent matter for contemplation, much more that *special* providence of his in the guidance of humane affairs, which have been alwayes managed with various wisdome.

But especially in his dispensations towards these latter ages, wherein there have been many new, unusual emergencies, such as our fore-fathers have not known.

How many strange observable passages may a considering man pick

out

out amongſt the affairs of theſe few laſt years? How ſtrangely hath the whole courſe of things both in Church and ſtate, been turned about, beyond all mens imaginations! How hath God in every reſpect, and on all ſides puſled the wiſdome of the wiſe, and enfeebled the ſtrength of the mighty, abating the glory of all humane power, lifting himſelf up above others, in thoſe things wherein they dealt moſt proudly; affecting great matters by deſpiſed means; what ſtrange ebbs and flowes of hope have we known? When men

have

have been most full of confidence, then some unexpected accident hath intervened, and disappointed all; So that the wisest men have been often put to stand at a gaze, not knowing what to judge of the issue of things; And (though we have not had leisure to observe it, yet) there has been something equivalent to this in other Nations: The whole Christian world being generally full of strange commotions. Now we may certainly conclude, that all these unusual turns and changes of things are not for nothing. There is some

ſome great deſign to be accompliſhed by them. 'Tis our duty with *diligence* to obſerve the paſſages, and with *patience* to attend the iſſue.

2. This may direct us what to judg of the preſent times under which we are fallen. If it be ſo that every particular event is ſo exactly regular and beautiful; hence then we may infer, how all that confuſion and diſorder which ſeem to be in the affairs of theſe times, is not ſo much in the things themſelves, as in our miſtake of them. The *Roughest Seaſons* (though they may be unſuitable

ſuitable to our deſires) yet have in them a proper comelineſſe, as well as times of the *greateſt ſerenity*.

True indeed, the Scripture doth ſometimes motion *evil dayes*; but this is not ſo to be underſtood as if time in it ſelf could be evil, either *Naturally*, for ſo God pronounced it good; or *Morally*, becauſe 'tis not ſubjected to any moral rule; but onely *Accidentally* in reſpect of our miſtake and abuſe of it: when either we judge of it according to our own *wiſhes*, or miſpend it according to our own *luſts*. 'Tis onely unwiſe,

Eph. 5. 16.

2 Tim. 3. 1, 2.

wiſe, unholy men, that make unhappy times.

As in the *works of Creation* nothing is properly deformed, but every thing hath a peculiar beauty, according to that rank and ſtation wherein 'tis placed; Though in vulgar ſpeech we uſe to call a toad and a ſerpent ugly, yet that is onely in reference to common eſteem; whereas in reſpect of the univerſe they are as regular and comely parts as any of the reſt; their outward ſhapes being ſuitable to their inward forms, and thoſe purpoſes for which they were intended. So is it likewiſe

likewiſe in *the wayes of Providence*, thoſe deſignes that in reſpect of our apprehenſions are carried on by a cryptical involved method, are yet in themſelves of as excellent contrivance, as any of thoſe that ſeem to be of more facile and perſpicuous order.

If a man in theſe times ſhall with his reaſon conſult onely the outward face of things, they muſt needs ſeem full of irregularities and diſorder; when the ſpirits of men in the proſecution of the ſame ends, and the pretence of *publick welfare*, ſhal be imbittered againſt one another

ther, even to *publick ruine*; when there is *a violent perverting of judgment and justice* in a Nation, and *on the side of the oppressor is might, but the oppressed have none to comfort them.* Eccles. 5.8 Chap. 4.1.

When there is a total subversion of those degrees in which the order and harmony of things doth consist, *Servants being on horses, and Princes walking as servants on the earth. When the mountains are removed, and pillars of the earth tremble.* When Religion and Laws (which are the *foundation* of a people) *are out of course.* Eccl. 10.7 Job 9.5.6 Psa. 11.6.

And yet even in all this, there may be a design of Providence

Providence for our good. This is certain, all Gods promiſes to his Church are infallibly true, and all his diſpenſations (though never ſo croſſe in outward appearance) have a tendency towards the fulfilling of thoſe promiſes. And why ſhould not a man reſt himſelf in this belief?

In our natural enquiries after the *efficient* cauſe of things, when our reaſon is at a ſtand, we are fain ſometimes to ſit down, and ſatisfie our ſelves in the notion of *occult qualities*; And therefore much more ſhould we be content to be ignorant

rant in the *final* cauſe of things, which lye more deep and obſcure then the other.

Let no man then preſume to cenſure the ſeveral viciſſitudes and changes of things, as if they were unſeaſonable and ill contrived. Remember we are but ſhort-ſighted, and cannot diſcern the various references, and dependencies amongſt the great affairs in the world, and therefore may be eaſily miſtaken in our opinion of them. We do in this world (for we muſt part) ſee onely the *dark ſide* of Providence. At the laſt & great day of *manifeſtation*

plot of divine love shall be layed open, then we shall be able to discern the Beauty of Providence in all the rugged passages of it; how *tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword, do all work for the best to those that love God.* Rom. 8. 28 35

Judg nothing therefore before its time, 1 Cor. 4. 5. Consider, *we cannot see the works of God from the beginning to the end.* And you know there is a vast difference betwixt the *beginning* and the *end* of a building. It may be our lots perhaps in these times to see only the *beginning* of the fabrick; when the old frame

frame is demoliſhed, the rubbiſh lyes ſcattered about, the new materials being gathered into heaps. Poſterity perhaps may ſee the *end* of it, when all theſe confuſed preparations ſhall be made up into a beautiful ſtructure.

2. This may ſerve for *reproof* of two ſorts of perſons: *Uſe* 2. For Reproof.

1. Thoſe that do not obſerve or regard the works of the Lord.

2. Thoſe that murmur and repine at them.

1. This may reprove thoſe that do not obſerve or regard the works of the Lord. 'Tis a great argument

gument of infidelity and irreligion, when men let many remarkable providences passe by them without notice or observation. Or when they look upon them onely in a slight and superficiall manner, like those whom the Prophet *Isaiah* com-
Isai. 42.20 plains of, *Seeing many things, but observing not.*

This sin of inadvertencie of Gods various providences, hath been oftentimes severely *threatned* and *punished* in Scripture, *Isa.* 5.12. *Because they regard not the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of his hands, therfore is my people gone into captivi-*

ty

And again, *Je.* 12. 11. *The whole Land is made desolate, because no man layeth to heart.*

The heavieſt judgements that can befall a Nation, are *Captivity* and *Deſolation.* And yet they are both denounced a gainſt this ſtupiditie and careleſneſſe of ſpirit. And you may gueſſe at the heinouſneſs of the ſin, by the greatneſs of the puniſhment.

'Tis a ſin, that is after a more eſpecial manner appropriated to wicked men, *Pſa.* 10. 4, 5. *The wicked through the pride of his countenance wil not ſeek after God, God is not in all his*

thoughts. Thy judgments are farre above out of his sight. Things that he never enquires after or regards, as if he were not at all concerned in them. *Quæ supra nos nihil ad nos.* He looks no further then second causes, unto which he ascribes the successe or miscarriage of events; and doth not take notice of that divine Providence, by whose influence they are guided. You see this is made the note of wicked men. And therefore, as we would avoid that *censure*, so still it concerns us to avoid the *signe*.

2. This may serve for the reproof of those that murmur

murmur and repine at the works of providence, that take upon them the magisteriall judgment of events; as if they could tell how to frame things much better, and to contrive the issue of things to greater advantage. How ordinary is it for men to discourse thus concerning the great changes of these times? As if the unsearchable wayes of God were to be judged before the tribunall of humane reason; *Who art thou, O man, that disputest with God?* (saith the Apostle;) how despicable in comparison to his infinite majestie and

wiſdom? If there be a common-wealth amongſt Ants and Bees (as ſome Naturaliſts ſay there is) 'twould make a man ſmile to think, that they ſhould take upon them the cenſure of State-matters amongſt us men; and yet here the diſproportion is finite, whereas betwixt God and man 'tis infinite: *As the heavens are* Iſa. 55.8,9 *higher then the earth, ſo are my thoughts higher then your thoughts; and my wayes then your wayes.*

He that will take upon him to mend the contrivance of things, let him remember (ſayes one of the *Stoicks*) that the firſt

first thing he is to do, is *to mend God*, to teach him wisdom and care. And if he shall think himselfe unfit for that, let him not presume upon this. For consider, is not the Providence of God *exactly careful* of every thing? Is not he *infinitely wise* to dispose of all to the best? Are not all things *subservient* to his will? Why certainly then, (however matters may appear to us) yet nothing could have been better then it is. Every thing shall prove for the best in respect of *his glory*, and (if we belong to him) in respect of *our good* too. Epictetus.

'Tis an obſervable check which *Solomon* gives to ſuch preſumptuous perſons as are apt to repine at, and cenſure the courſe of things, *Eccl.* 7.10. *Say not thou, what is the cauſe why the former days were better then theſe? for thou doeſt not enquire wiſely concerning this.* It ſhould ſeem, that thoſe flouriſhing dayes of *Solomon*, ſo very eminent for all kind of plenty and peace (*Silver being in* Jeruſalem *as ſtones, & Cedars as the Sycomore in the vale for abundance*) were not yet without ſome moroſe repining ſpirits, who were ſtill maligning the

1 K. 20. 7

preſent

preſent condition of things; And therefore no wonder if we finde the like humor among men in other times.

This the Wiſe man doth here reprove, both by a *prohibition* and a *reaſon*.

1. A prohibition. *Say not thou, what is the cauſe why the former dayes were better then theſe?* that is, be not tranſported with that common humor, of cenſuring and condemning the preſent ſtate of times, and commending the times paſt; As if the courſe of events were not managed by the ſame wiſe Providence now which governed the world

world before. He doth not forbid men to enquire after the cauſe of publick ſufferings: For this is frequently elſewhere injoyned in Scripture, that upon the occaſion of any ſpecial judgment, we ſhould ſearch and try our hearts, conſider our wayes, and our doings, labouring to find out the cauſe of Gods diſpleaſure, that we may accordingly meet him in his wayes. But the meaning is, that we ſhould not take upon us the peremptory cenſure of times and diſpenſations, preſuming to condemn thoſe things wch we cannot underſtand.

2. The

2. The Reaſon. *For thou doſt not enquire wiſely concerning this thing.* Thats a figurative expreſſion ſtiled a *Meioſis*, when a phraſe ſignifies much more then the naked words do import. The meaning is, 'tis extreme folly for men to take upon them the cenſure of times and providences, as if they were competent judges of ſuch matters.

There are two places of Scripture that will make up a Syllogiſme to prove this concluſion.

He that judgeth of a matter before he hath inquired into, and underſtands it, it is folly and ſhame unto him,

Prov. 18.13. But now, *It doth not belong unto us to know the times and the ſeaſons which the Father hath kept in his own power*, Acts 17. And therefore it muſt needs be folly to take upon us the magiſteriall cenſure of ſuch things.

Mat. 6.34 Every day hath its proper *evill*, as well the former as theſe; and every day hath its proper *advantage*, as well theſe as the former. The verie dregs of time, if we endeavour to make a right uſe of them, may be redeemed into opportunitie.

Eph. 5.16

There are two reaſons of mens offending in this kinde. 1. When

1. When they look only upon ſome *particulars*, without the conſideration of their *proper end* or *general frame*. Now 'tis true indeed, that ſome particular events, *ſingly* looked upon, may ſeem very prejudiciall; but the whole *contexture* of affairs in their *cooperation* ſhall prove for the beſt. All things ſhall *work together*, συνεργεῖ *for good to thoſe that love God*, Rom. 8.28.

But now 'tis above our capacity to comprehend the whole frame of things; And that is not diſorder in reſpect of the *whole*, which to us may appear

appear ſo, being compared with ſome *particulars*. You know, that in the natural body, the variety and diſſimilitude of parts, is required to the beauty of the whole; the roundneſſe of the head, the length of the arm, the flatneſs of the hand, blackneſs in one part, and whiteneſs in another; all theſe being ſingly compared amongſt themſelves, though they may ſeem to argue ſome oppoſition and deformity, yet look upon them as they ſtand in relation to the whole frame, and it will appear how in their ſeveral wayes they

do

do each of them conduce to its comelineſſe and order. If this lower world had in it no changes and varieties, but were in all reſpects alike, it would not then be ſo properly κόσμος, a beautiful world, as χάος, a lump or maſſe.

2. Another occaſion of mens offending in this kind, is, when they will judg of events, according as they ſuite with their own wiſhes. And in this caſe, 'tis impoſſible that every humor ſhould be ſatisfied; becauſe particular deſires (beſides their oppoſition to one another) will likewiſe be inconſiſtent with the general

general design. It would seem better perhaps to every private man, if he himself were a Magistrate, or a King, and every common Souldier a Commander, or a General. But how could this consist with the exigencies of Common-wealth, or an Army, where there must be degrees, and disproportion of places according to the necessity of several imployments? 'Tis so in the government of this great Universe: That difference which there is betwixt particular things, and times, and persons, doth much conduce to the beauty

and

and convenience of the whole.

'Tis our ſafeſt way then to conclude that all matters are for the beſt, *beautiful in their times*, though to us they may ſeem full of diſorder and contrariety. Thus the Apoſtle, in that remarkable place, *Rom.* 11. 33. ſpeaking concerning the rejection of the Jews, when God would caſt off and deſtroy his peculiar people, and that for his own glory and advantage, he concludes, *His judgments are unſearchable, and his wayes paſt finding out. But of him, to him are all things.* As if he ſhould have ſaid, God will

will do this ſtrange work; and though for my part, I know not the reaſon of it, *His judgments are unſearchable*, &c. yet ſure I am, that *of him*, and *to him* are all things; that is, as the making of all things was *of his power*, ſo the reſolution of all things ſhall be *to his glory*.

Though *his judgments are as the great deep*, for their obſcurity and unmeaſurableneſs, not to be fathomed by our ſhallow apprehenſions; yet *his righteouſneſs is as the ſtrong mountains*, for their eminency and ſtableneſs, *Pſal.* 36.6. *Though clouds and darkneſs may be round about*

about him, yet righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne, Pſal. 97. 2.

3. This may ſerve for *Exhortation,* to perſwade us unto theſe four duties. *Uſe* 3. For Exhortation.

1. Not to be too haſty in our deſire of proſecution of any things.

2. Nor to trouble our ſelves with any ſolicitous care about the ſucceſſe of things.

3. To be equally prepared for all future events.

4. To behave our ſelves with careſulneſſe and contentment in all conditions.

1 Hence

1. Hence we learn not to be *too hasty* in our desire or prosecution of any thing. God best knows the fittest season for every event; we shall have it when its time is come, and before that 'twould not be beautiful: *Like snow in Harvest* (as the Wise man speaks) which though it might possibly be some *refreshment* to our particular, yet would be a *deformity* in the couse of Nature.

Pro. 25. 13

There are some men whom the Prophet styles of *a hasty heart*, נמהרי לב *Isa.* 35. 4. who are too heady and impatient in their hopes. And it is a

Transl. t: Fearful;

weakness

weakneſſe that ariſes from our infidelity and diſtruſt of Providence. *For he that believeth maketh no haſt*, Chap. 28. 16. 'Tis Gods uſual courſe to defer what he promiſes, thereby to exerciſe our faith, to put an edge on our deſires, and a value upon the bleſſing. In natural affairs, we are fain to expect the proper ſeaſon and *maturity* of things; the husbandman will wait for his harveſt, he doth not expect to ſowe and reap both in a day. It ſhould be ſo likewiſe in other matters; And ſince that is alwayes the fitteſt time for every thing

thing which God appoints, it will become us then patiently to wait his leisure, and not with over-hasty desires to run before him.

Abraham was fain to tarrie a long time for a son, *David* for a Kingdome, and the whole world for *Christ*. He that rightly understands the worth of any blessing, and his own want, cannot think much to wait for it. The poore man, at the pool of *Bethesda*, being sensible of his own lamenesse, was content to tarrie there 38 years in hopes of remedie. Suppose a promise were deferred

ferred to the utmoſt, yet do but compare the ſhortneſſe of our lives with the duration of our ſouls, and then no delay can ſeem tedious. *Neq; enim eſt aliquid in tam brevibus vitæ metis ita ſerum, quod longum expectare immortalis putet animus.* A man conſcious to himſelf of his own immortalitie, cannot think any time long, which is confined within the narrow bounds of life. *Boetius conſol. l. 4*

Is there then any mercie which thou expecteſt, do not over-raſhly haſten it, with any indirect project, as if thou wert able to help the providence of God

God with wiles and devices of thine owne. Though it be long in coming, yet it will come at last, it cannot be more slow then sure. When *Isaac* was layed upon the Altar, and bound for a sacrifice, and his Fathers hand lift up for the fatal blow, yet then there came a rescue from heaven, which would not have been so beautiful, if by any unlawful act it had been hastned before that time, either by *Abrahams* sparing his son, or *Isaacs* resisting his father.

Joseph did undergo a tedious imprisonment in the

the Land of *Egypt*; 'tis likely, being the key keeper, he might have taken his own time, and have ſcaped when he would. But then he had loſt his preferment; whereas by tarrying Gods leiſure, he was delivered with advantage. Though *David* had been a long while anointed to a Kingdom, yet becauſe he did not uſe any haſty means for the injoying of it, therefore did providence clear the paſſage for him, and proſpered it to him afterwards. He might have killed *Saul* in the Cave, and *Abner* too, when he found them ſleeping; but

1 Sam. 24. & 1 1,26,17

then

then he had been over-hasty: 'twere better they should fall by their Enemies. *The Lord shall smite them when their day shall come to die*, 1 Sam. 26. 10. And before that, 'twould be but rashness to attempt it. And so likewise when he stopt himself in his haste after *Nabals* life, you know within a while after, God took him away by his own immediate hand, and gave both his wife and estate to *David*.

An over-forwardnesse in the hastening of our hopes, is the ready way to imbitter them unto us. You know how much

trouble

trouble and contention there grew from that hasty act of *Sarah*, when in her distrust of the promise; and fear of being childless, she must needs give *Hagar* to *Abraham*.

So likewise for *Jacobs* too much haste in getting the blessing by a wrong means, you know it cost him afterwards many dangers, and a tedious exile. Whereas if he had tarried longer, God would have brought it about for him by a more easie and beautiful way.

Gods time is the best, and he never fails his own season; *I the Lord will hasten it in its time.*

Isa.60. 22. For us to measure the fitnesse of seasons by our own weak apprehensions, is not this to set the Sun by our Dial? We are too short-sighted, apt to antedate the promises. *The Lord will arise and have mercy upon* Sion, *when the time to favour her, yea, when the set time is come*, Psal. 102.13.

2. Hence we learn not to trouble our selves with any solicitous care about the successe of things. To serve Providence in the usual *meanes*, that is our work; But the *issue* and *event* of things, that's Gods work, we have nothing to do in it.

That

That which is not under our *power*, ſhould not be under our *care*. If there be nothing at our diſpoſal, but that all events do depend upon an higher Providence, 'twere but a vaine thing then to buſie our ſelves with hopes and feares about them. Much of the diſquietneſſe amongſt men in the world ariſes from hence, that they buſie themſelvs about Gods work, and neglect their own. Ver. 9.

Is there then an *evill* thou *feareſt*? why 'tis not in the power of any creature to hurt thee. Though men ſhould uſe plots, and threats againſt thee, yet

they can do nothing. They ſate together, and counſelled againſt *David*, *deviſing to take away his life*, Pſal. 31. 13. But what was his comfort? why, ſaith he, *ver.* 15. *My times are in thy hands, O Lord.* He knew that no ill ſucceſſe towards him was in the power of others.

Or is there an evil thou *feeleſt*? why, it comes from the hand of God. Be not then impatient at the inſtrument. 'Tis but a childiſh, curriſh thing to beat the rod, or bite the ſtone that hurt thee. *David* could quietly undergo the railing of *Shimei*, when

when once he had discerned in it the Providence of God.

Or is there *a good thou hopest for?* why, it is not within the reach of thy abilities. And therefore 'twere but in vain to think thou could'st command it by thine own endeavours. We would count it a mad thing for one that is naturally low, to busie himself in the study and labour of growing tall, because this is not alterable by any thing in our power; *Since no man can adde one cubit to his stature.* Why, tis so in other things likewise; God doth as

well ſet bounds to our *eſtates*, as to our *ſtatures*; and of our ſelves, we can as little adde one *penny* to that, as one *cubit* to this. And therefore, never let any one think that he can raiſe himſelf as he pleaſes: and be the maſter of his own fortunes. Though he were furniſhed with the greateſt helps and probabilities of advancement. Yet Eccleſ. 9. 11 *the battell is not alwayes to the ſtrong, nor the race to the ſwift, neither bread to the wiſe, nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all.* That is, there is a ſecret

ſecret Providence, which doth ſo unavoidably diſpoſe of theſe lower events, that the likelieſt means we can uſe, cannot promiſe us any certain ſucceſſe.

They that with a compaſſe wiſdome will delay events, that with forecaſts and proviſions will binde Providence, for the moſt part, are not onely diſappointed in what they hoped for, but do meet with a curſe inſtead of it. See that place, *Iſa* 50. 11. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compaſſe your ſelvs about with ſparks walk in the light of your fire and in the ſparks that you*

have kindled; this ſhall you have of my hands, you ſhall lye down in ſorrow.

3. Hence we learn to be equally prepared for all future events, not wiſhing for one more then another. Whatever comes to paſſe ſhall be *beautiful*; and therefore ſhould be *welcome*. All things that befal us, ſhall lead us on to the ſame journeys end, Happineſs. And therefore we ſhould not in our expectation of future matters ingage our ſelves in the deſire of any particular ſucceſſe. But with a *travellers* indifferency (as *Epictetus* ſpeaks in *Arian*) who when

Deſert. li. c. ca. 7.

when he comes to doubtful turnings, doth not desire one way should be true more then another. So should we entertain every thing that we meet with in our passage through this life: Especially since we are sure that there is none of them, but if we belong to God, shall further us in that which is our main business, our *journey* to happiness. And therefore to be very solicitous about any particular successe, what is it but to limit and confine the power of God? nay, to prefer our own policy before the wisdome of

Providence, as if we alone were able to discern what would be the best issue of things? Mark how the same Heathen bespeaks such a person: Thou foolish man (saith he) doest thou not desire that which will be most convenient for thee? And can there be any thing better then what God appoints? διὰ τὸ ὅσον ὄπι σοὶ διαφθείρει τὸν κριτὴν, παράγεις τὸν σύμβουλον. Wherefore by such immoderate and eager desires, thou doest as much as in thee lies, to corrupt thy Judge, and seduce thy Counsellor.

The *Stoicks* have many excellent

excellent paſſages to this purpoſe. *Nunquam ſapientem pœnitentia ſubit*, (ſaith *Seneca*) *quia nihil melius illo tempore fieri potuit quam quod factum eſt.* A wiſe man is never troubled at any croſs event he knows nothing could have been better then it is. *Omnia illi ſuccedunt, nihil præter opinionem accidit.* All things are ſucceſful to him, he is diſappointed in nothing, becauſe indifferent to every thing. Whilſt others are toſſed up and down betwixt hopes and fears, his mind is eſtabliſhed.

De Benef. lib. 4. 34.

Now if meer *reaſon* could

could advance *Heathen* men to such resolutions, much more then should a *Christians Faith* in the Providence of God, with those many promises wherein he hath an interest, raise his mind to this heroick temper, and make him bend himself with a submissive compliance unto every condition.

Ob. But what then, may not a man (nay, should he not) be very earnest in his desires and prayers, for some particular deliverance or blessing?

Sol. I answer: Yes. But in all *temporal* matters, it must

must be ſtill with a tacit ſubmiſſion to the will of God, who knowes better what is fit for us, then we our ſelves. See the example of *David* to this purpoſe, 1 *Sam.* 15. 25. He was there put to a very great exigence, his ſon *Abſalom* had ſuddenly raiſed a great Army againſt him, inſomuch as he was fain to flye for his life. There were ſome of the Prieſts adhered to him, and followed him with the Ark. But he, upon ſerious thoughts deſires them to return again. For (ſaith he) *If I ſhall finde favour in the eys of the Lord, he will bring me*

again, and ſhew me both it, and his habitation; But if he thus ſay unto me, I have no delight in thee, behold, here I am, let him do to me, as ſeemeth good unto him. Here's no deep anxiety or æſtuation of ſpirit: no bitter exclaiming againſt his unnatural ſon, and diſloyal ſubjects; but a quiet ſuccumbency, an indifferent compoſure of mind, which reſolves to be content in every condition. He puts the caſe both wayes, and is provided for either. If it prove after *this* manner, why, then ſo; if *otherwiſe* then thus. So true is that common Emblem, that

every

every wiſe man is a *cube* or *dye*, not to be flung from his botom. Let him be caſt any way, he ſtill lights upon his right *baſis*; whatever his *condition* may be, *Si fractus illabatur orbis*, yet his *mind* is ſtil calm and peaceable.

Ob. But would you have a man turn *Stoick?* ſhould he not be troubled at the afflictions that befal him?

Ob.

Sol. I anſwer. Yes: He muſt be ſenſible of his ſufferings, and conſequently cannot but grieve under them; eſpecially ſo far as his own ſin and neglect hath occaſioned them. But then it

Sol.

it ſhould be his care to quiet his heart from immoderate trouble, by the conſideration, of that wiſe Providence, who doth diſpoſe of all for the beſt.

4. Laſtly, hence we learn, to behave our ſelves with *chearfulneſſe* and *contentment* under all thoſe conditions which the Providence of God ſhall think fitteſt for us. 'Tis the Wiſe mans own inference from the text in the verſes immediately after it. V. 12. 13. *There is nothing better then for a man to rejoyce, and do good in his life that he ſhould eat and drink and injoy the good of his labour.*

labour. For if every thing be beſt which God appoints, we have no reaſon then to be troubled at any event. What though it do croſſe our deſires, yet 'twould not have been ſo well, if it had been otherwiſe. Things cannot be better with us then they are. *David* thought it a hard caſe, that his childe by *Bathſheba* muſt dye. But did he loſe any thing by it? was it not better for him to have ſuch a legitimate Heir as *Solomon* was? We are but ill contrivers of our own welfare, and therefore ſhould without murmuring

Æquum eſt ut homini placeat, quicquid placet Deo

ing ſubmit our ſelves and affairs to the government of Providence. What though that do ſtraiten us in our deſires: you are content to let the *Phiſician* bar you of many things, becauſe he hath caſt your water, felt your pulſe. Conſider then, doth it not as much concern us to provide for the ſalvation of our ſouls, as the health of our bodies? or doth not God underſtand this, as well as the Phyſician that? What reaſon have we then to repine at his proceedings? He was a wiſe ſon in *Plutarch*, who being told by a friend that his

his father would disinherit him; answered, *Non faciet nisi faciendum:* He will do nothing but what he should. Thus should a Christian willingly resign up himself in every condition to the disposal of Providence.

Do but apply this consideration according to the several occasions of your lives. When your hearts are at any times amazed or dejected with the thought of the *publike* confusions; Remember that God sits in heaven, observing and ordering all these inferiour motions for the best.

And so too in the case of

of *particular* ſufferings 'tis likely that there is not any amongſt you, but hath ſome kinde of *private* trouble & grievance to which he is more eſpecially expoſed; either weakneſs of body, or too narrow a fortune, loſſes in your eſtates, diſappointment in you hopes, unhappy relations, or the like. And theſe things as we are *men*, cannot chuſe but grate upon our ſpirits, with ſome kinde of harſhneſs and diſcontent. But now, as *Believers*, we have a remedy againſt them. For conſider, there is nothing befalls us by chance. All things

things are ordered by the deliberate counſel and fore-knowledg of God. He is as exactly careful of every one of us, as if he had nothing elſe to look after. Do not think that any trouble befals you, becauſe he doth not regard, for his care and providence doth extend to all things; nor becauſe he *cannot* help, for he is Almighty; nor becauſe he *will not*, for he is equally infinite in all his Attributes; But becauſe his *wiſdome* finds that condition to be fitteſt for thee; there is ſomething amiſs which ſhould be mended. When the ſuperfluous

perfluous humour is corrected, the phyſicall potion ſhall be taken away. And 'tis not reaſonable to expect phyſick and health both together. When the wound is healed, the ſmarting plaiſter ſhall be removed. And thou mayeſt confidently ſay with *David*, *Pſal.* 119. 75. *I know, O Lord that thy judgements are right, and that thou in faithfulneſs haſt afflicted me.*

How happy might we be, if we could ſettle our hearts upon theſe conſiderations?

FINIS.